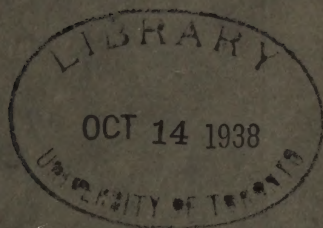


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*National Guilds League, London*



# THE GUILD IDEA

AN APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

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# THE GUILD IDEA.

## AN APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC.

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“THE real aim of the miners,” complained the *Morning Post* a few years ago, “is to make mining, not a profitable industry, but a source of living to the miner.” And here, no doubt, it voiced a widespread fear and a public apprehension. For the public is afraid of the Trade Unions. It is told that their purpose is nothing less than revolutionary, and that their triumph will be the common ruin.

Yet the public is not confessedly in favour of long hours and low wages, nor does it range itself consistently and decisively upon the side of the employers. More than once it has been possible to rouse public sympathy and public enthusiasm when the victims of industrial oppression have fought for an increased wage or a shorter working day. The existence of a “social conscience,” even though it is often dormant, and always inadequate, cannot be denied. Toryism has never been averse to a paternal administration of discreet reform, while Liberalism, horrified at the hideous fruits of its philosophy, has gladly jettisoned the iron logic of free contract and free trade. The public does not discourage the attainment of better conditions.

But the public has fear of the Trade Unions. Serenely accustomed to a Parliament which talks much and is well reported in the Press, it cannot understand these strangely powerful bodies with their long silences and their sudden strikes. It knows nothing of the Trade Union agreements, nothing of Conciliation Boards, nothing of the long and wearing negotiations that usually precede an appeal to force. It only discovers the existence of Trade Unionism when the Trade Unionists are no longer at work, and the middle-class man only begins to realise the meaning of a railway when the railwaymen are not there. Then the public takes up its morning paper and drinks in the lies and petty spite that the rich purvey as news. The result is a petulant sense of disgust, a hatred of being cheated, a fury. And if the public



thereupon distrusts Trade Unionism as a whole, very certainly it is angered by its rules and regulations and restrictions, for it can see in these so-called "limitations of output" only a sectional selfishness, a grave menace to the nation, and a sinister hint of that black Syndicalism which it has been taught to regard as more terrible even than Socialism itself. It cannot recognise that these things are defences and outworks against capitalist aggression, nor can it accept the excuse that the striker is aiming his blow at the profit-hunter and not at the community. After all, if it is in the papers, it is so; that is the British view. And the plutocrats who control the Press are careful to provide that the Trade Unions are remorselessly shown up as a cruel conspiracy against the welfare of the nation.

## **The War and the Class War.**

The European war has thrown a powerful searchlight upon our national economy, and beneath its rays the same situation has been yet more clearly revealed. The course of production and distribution, whether of food or of munitions, did not run smoothly. While profits were being made as usual, and in many cases heavily increased, the supplies, which were the source of those profits, were poor in quality and scanty in amount. Capitalism had never boasted of the quality of its productions; in the very heyday of Victorian Liberalism its proudest claim had been the guarantee of cheapness and of quantity. But now, in the name of national need, and with a triumphant Navy to ensure for them the freedom of the oceans, the British capitalists and merchants could not even give the nation enough. And so the first industrial centre of Europe, when called upon to produce its vaunted quantity, was a scene of chaos and incompetence. There could be no doubt that the accepted system of production and distribution had failed the country, and that, while it continued to sweep in excellent profits for the few, it could still be an execrable servant of the whole.

Naturally there was public anger. But that anger was not vented upon the employers who were robbing the nation, nor upon the competitive commercialism which encouraged, if it did not enforce, the merciless campaign of pillage. And so far from an indignant people rising terribly in its wrath to overthrow a fraudulent system, that system was scarcely criticised. Instead the Trade Unions were denounced: the workers were censured as unpatriotic because they hesitated to abandon their rules and restrictions, and slandered because they would not give themselves utterly into the hands of Mammon. It was the Class War, men said, that would hinder our chances in the War of Nations, and it was the Trade Unionist, with his pettifogging rules and his selfish strikes, who was the enemy of the people.



One thing was certain. At a time when national unity was essential the bickering of rich and poor and the ugly explosions of animosity and distrust had not vanished from the country. The majority complained that the workers were as greedy as they were unpatriotic; a few retorted that profits were higher than ever and that the shipping merchants and the coal-owners were our deadliest foes. The patriotism of Labour was much debated. Torrents of virulent abuse were poured on the miners of South Wales and the engineers of the Clyde, and few asked themselves what the Engineers could not have exacted by a unanimous strike in the summer of 1915 or what the Miners could not have wrung from a desperate nation. But while the relative patriotism and forbearance of this class and that were being vigorously disputed, few stopped to ask themselves whether the Capitalist system made national unity a practical or even a theoretical possibility. How could industrial peace obtain in a world where "grab" was the acknowledged principle? The *Times* defended the depredations of the ship-owners by saying that these men were ruled by the iron laws of supply and demand and were therefore justified in exploiting the necessity of the nation and profiting by the great scarcity of ships. But what is sauce for the ship-owner is sauce for the ship-maker. If the rich might profit by the scarcity of ships, why should not the poor profit by the scarcity of labour? The demand was as unanswerable in logic as it was fatal to the community. Nothing could have been more foolish than to waste words on individuals. Both sides were inured to guerilla warfare, to suspicions and tricks, and eternal vigilance. The system enforced hostility and denied the possibility of a genuine national unity. A method of production based on the law of Supply and Demand—based, that is to say, upon a constant struggle for position between the two great forces of Capital and Labour—is utterly unstable, utterly destructive of good production, and utterly unreliable as a national servant. Inevitably the consumer is ground between the upper millstone of the employer and the nether millstone of the Trade Union; inevitably the national economy is wasteful and disorderly. Let the system be stripped naked and revealed in all its deformity.

### **The Slave and the Wage-Slave.**

The chattel-slave of past history was the absolute and unquestioned possession of the owner. He was not regarded as a human being and he had no personality in the eye of the law. Thus the chattel-slave took up a clearly defined place in the scheme of production. He was a living tool. Just as a machine is a piece of capital to-day, so the slave was a piece of capital on an estate or in a household. The owner spent twenty pounds, for instance, and bought a living tool: if that tool ceased to live or became so weak as to be useless the master had made a bad invest-



ment. Therefore it was to the owner's interest to keep the slave healthy, just as it profits the modern capitalist to keep his plant in the best possible condition. Here was an honest and straightforward application of the laws of Supply and Demand. The price of a slave was based on his scarcity-value either as a man or as a craftsman. No personal or humanitarian considerations befogged the issue. If the master chose to mend his slave's ways by flogging him to death he might do so, just as to-day a man may mend his motor-bicycle until there is nothing left of it. Only in each case a portion of capital has been wasted. Chattel-slavery has at least the merit of being simple. But in the course of time the growth of man's moral consciousness has rendered the institution of chattel-slavery intolerable to civilised people. We have refused to deny personality to a class of natural inferiors: we have refused in theory to make use of living tools. Social and political freedom have been won by various efforts and in varying degrees. The dictates of conscience have altered; political development has altered; but the vital factor of the economic situation has not altered in the least. Economic power is still based upon monopoly. The means of production and distribution are still in the hands of the few, and the circle is narrow. Therefore the many depend, as of old, upon the few for the means of their existence.

In past times the few owned, not only land and capital, but men and women, whom they bought and sold at will. Now they cannot buy human beings as such; instead they buy their labour-power and apply it to land and capital. The many are not now sold for life, but only for eight or ten hours a day. And it is not their bodies that are sold—only their labour. Hence they are no longer pieces of capital. Politically free, they have a commodity to sell, their labour, and their wage is the market-price of that commodity. That is the meaning of wage-slavery.

### **Labour as a Commodity.**

Labour, then, is a thing bought and sold under the merciless strain of competition. The results of this fact are three-fold. It involves the degradation of work, the waging of a ceaseless and bitter class-war, and the substitution of plutocracy for political democracy. In the first place, the purchase and sale of labour as a commodity deprives it of personal values. Just as a man who has sold his house cannot claim to have any subsequent management of the property, so a man who has sold his labour cannot claim any right of subsequent control. So, whether the purchaser be a private individual or a company of individuals or the community in form of State or municipality, the labourer is at present in very truth a wage-slave. His foremen and managers are appointed autocratically from above; his methods and processes of work are prescribed by others; he has no rights, no status, and



an everlasting and demoralising dread of "the sack." His duty is not to serve the community nor to do good work, but only to make himself profitable. He must give value for his wage or he may starve. Thus are the activities of man warped and crushed and shattered by the constant pressure of competition. There can be no freedom in industry and no genuine national service in the workshops while labour-power is bought and sold like any article of commerce. The raising of wages can not allay the so-called Labour unrest, for that unrest is not solely material. Deeply hidden in many a worker there lives a sense of the intolerable degradation of wage-slavery and a flickering desire to be a man and not a "hand," a person and not a living tool. And that desire can never be fulfilled, unless we completely alter our outlook and take up a more spiritual and a more human attitude with regard to the workaday existence of man. Secondly the commodity theory of Labour divides society of necessity into two factions, with interests opposed and irreconcilable. Of what avail can it be to talk of national unity and to deplore class bitterness and class war while the nation is split up into those who must buy labour cheap and those who must sell it dear? The worker, continually driven down to subsistence level, naturally strives to force up the value of his labour by one means or another. Surrounded by the luxury of the idle, he would be no man did he not make every effort in the interests of himself and his family and his class to sell his labour-power at the highest possible price, and so to make a decent livelihood. Primarily the situation is simple, as simple as war. On it, however, a flood of complexities may be shed, social compunctions that lead to mild reform, charities, truces, and all the well-intentioned chatter and activity of those who bravely maintain in the face of iron facts that "the interests of rich and poor are identical." These interests are not, and never can be, identical, so long as the purchase and sale of labour is carried on under the law of supply and demand, so long as personal and humane considerations are buried beneath the mountain-mass of economic necessity. We are faced with a simple struggle between two incomplete and growing monopolies, the monopoly of capital and the monopoly of labour. And here, as in all wars, the neutral and the non-combatant must suffer with the guilty. The public pays while the battle rages. But that the battle does rage, that is the vital, incontestable fact. Let us not cry peace when there is no peace.

### **Plutocratic Control.**

Again, it must be obvious that in a society torn and tortured by the ceaseless struggle of two would-be monopolists the temporary victor in the economic warfare must dominate the whole community. The monopolists of land and capital control the means of livelihood of the dispossessed or proletariat: but a



mastery which is only economic in theory becomes political also in practice. The granting of political liberty to the working classes has made but a trifling difference to the seat of real sovereignty in the nation. The possessing classes can form and mould the general will by their control of the law, of education, and of the Press. By their wealth they can dominate Parliamentary elections, supply the vitally important Party funds, and by their economic hold on Labour they can exercise a rigid grasp upon the whole activities of the people. They hold at their mercy the executive power of the State, and though the poor man may have a vote he has to choose between two policies emanating from the ideas of the rich. Vote for Asquith and Reform, vote for Bonar Law and Alteration—Tweedledum and Tweedledee!

Labour Parties may come and go in this country and in others. Moments of panic may seize the possessing classes during which they may make concessions, genuine as well as specious, to the proletarian demands. But on the whole it will be found that the owners of the means of common livelihood are enabled by that ownership to control the activities of men who are politically, but not economically, free. It is vain to hurl abuse at particular individuals and to accuse them of betraying the electorate. However strong their efforts may be, they will dash themselves in vain upon the iron wall of economic monopoly.

The individual caught up in the cruel machinery of competition and monopoly is helpless. The politician is helpless, for economic power precedes political power. When the Labour Members protest and stamp and let off steam the worker vainly hopes that something may be done, that he has his watch-dog after all. And so his chains are gilded.

To talk of democratic control, either of domestic or of foreign policy, will remain a vanity so long as the possessing few can by their economic grip throttle the political activities of the many. It is a common habit to complain of the extent to which the Cabinet dominates the House of Commons, and the complaint is a just one. But it is well to go a step further and to realise to the full how far the Plutocracy dominates the Cabinet. While money talks in Lombard Street it whispers in Whitehall, and there is no escape from the fact that England is in reality neither a democracy nor an aristocracy, but the home and domain of the Plutocrat. For the monopolists of land and capital hold the worker in the palm of their hand. By their control of him and of his means of existence, by their Party funds, and their boundless resources, they keep his political activities well under the rein. And very tactfully it is done.

### **Ways of Escape.**

We are faced with a crushing monopoly. The task, then, is either to break it or to transfer it from private to public hands. To



break monopoly by the wide distribution of land and capital is the remedy suggested by Hilaire Belloc and his following of sincere democrats, whose sympathies are touched by the Catholic tradition of the Middle Ages. Property is to them a magic wand which will destroy the giant of Capitalism. They are under no illusions as to the fact that they are attempting to go backwards and uphill and that they are working against the grain of civilisation's present development.

They are well aware that progress does not consist in going blindly forward, but in adopting even the discarded ideas of history, should they seem to have value for us now. But the answer to them is the obvious one that they are attempting the impossible. No satisfactory schemes have yet been put forward for distributing the property of joint stock companies or for striking a blow at trusts and rings; nor can it reasonably be maintained that such distribution, once achieved, could be permanent. Even in the case of land, where action is much easier, to secure permanent distribution the State must forbid mortgaging and take away the right of alienation. And when that is gone, what is left of the theory of property? Again, small ownership of land by itself cannot hit industrial capitalism. In Austria the independent beet farmers fell utterly under the control of the Sugar Cartel, who kept down the price of the raw commodity to a fixed minimum. And in what way has peasant proprietorship in Ireland or in France and Belgium interfered with the capitalism of the towns? However much one may sympathise with the Distributive State in theory, one must acknowledge that, to say the least, it gives neither a detailed nor a final settlement of the class war.

## **State Socialism.**

But if the monopoly of land and capital cannot be broken, it may be transferred to public hands. That is the fundamental conception of State and Municipal Socialism. The consumers, organised either as a nation or as a town, are to buy out or to expropriate the private monopolists and to hand over the administration of their capital to public officers. This alteration of ownership is a far simpler economic proposition than that of the Distributivists. It works with the grain of society. It is going on in varying degrees from year to year. The Distributive State has vanished and, as a future possibility, is still in the air. The Collectivist State is in the making.

And just for this reason opponents of the wage system must be on their guard. The mere substitution of a public for a private master does not destroy wage-slavery—a fact which is amply borne out in the publicly-owned industries to-day. So long as the economic basis of society remains the same—the purchase of labour for wages—so long will the wage system exist, be the



purchaser State or millionaire. The gravest danger that threatens our country to-day is the capture of Socialism by the rich and for the rich. Plutocracy may change its spots, but it is not therefore destroyed; and the old criticism that, if we are not careful, the Duke of So-and-So will cease to be a landlord and become State Curator of Lands with a salary equal to his recent income, or, worse still, a permanent State bondholder, becomes more and more justified as time goes on. It is quite admissible that a system of State Socialism, which included complete expropriation of the capitalist and equality of income among the producers, would put an end to the wage system. It is equally possible, however, that political activity in a plutocratic State could be sufficiently controlled by the plutocrats to pervert Socialism into a very different actuality.

This is no merely academic peril. The "Government Control" to which the nation has been compelled to resort by the inexorable circumstances of war-time, introduced largely in order to restrain the unbridled licence of profiteering and to enable the Government to obtain the materials absolutely necessary for the carrying on of the war, is not without its consolations—so far as the railway, mining, and munitions industries are concerned—to the far-sighted capitalist, who, if he finds the tribute which he might have exacted from the community reduced in amount, has at least obtained for it a complete public sanction—an invaluable precedent for the social treaties of the impending Reconstruction era. Profit, in short, has gained a rise in status: the State, having obtained from the employer its fee for a licence to continue the exploitation of the worker and the public and imposed certain conditions of its own, confers on the capitalist a temporary commission as a public functionary and breezily adjures him to carry on. Is nationalisation suggested? The State prefers to trust the efficiency and integrity of the nation's Great Business Men. Is expropriation urged? The Government has no intention of rewarding the patriotism and public-spirit of the captains of industry so ill—moreover the edifice of credit must on no account be disturbed. The motive of these replies may be more easily understood if we inquire who the "State" and the "Government" at the present moment actually are. Previously the capitalist sought to influence the making of laws at Westminster; to-day he actually presides over the administration of them as a Controller at Whitehall. The Business Bureaucrat with a private "civil service" of his own suggests a new interpretation of the old motto of despotism "*L'Etat c'est Moi.*"

We are not denying that "Government Control" may prove good business to the public; in so far as it is efficient, far-sighted, and fearless, it may have excellent results; nor do we deny that Control Boards have in some cases given the Trade Unions a chance of acquiring new power and status in industry. But it is



not Socialism—not even State Socialism. It will not expropriate the rich; it will not emancipate the poor. It is at best “good business” and it is because Collectivists have been so eager to urge their panacea as a business proposition that they have forgotten the ideals they set out to attain.

## **Democracy in Industry.**

But, even granted that an alert people could so control the coming of Socialism that the Plutocracy failed to capture the new machine, the fact remains that political and industrial democracy are not and cannot be identical. The fundamental idea of State and Municipal Socialism is the administration of the commonly held capital by the political officers of the community. As a politician is responsible for the Post Office to-day, so presumably there would be various politicians responsible for all the main industries in the Collectivist State of to-morrow. Under the politicians there would in each case be a hierarchy of administrative officials appointed from external sources by examination, nomination, and so forth. That is the way in which the higher officials of the Post Office are chosen to-day, and State Socialists have never made it plain that they object utterly and fundamentally to this external control of industrial life. Political democracy they will praise to the skies, but industrial democracy they have shamefully neglected. But if we are invited to trust the people as consumers, why are we not to trust them as producers? Is not “trusting the worker” the logical conclusion of trusting the voter?

Accordingly, in a free Socialist community, industry, as well as politics, must be governed from within and from below. For the State-controlled industry we must substitute the independent and democratic Guild working in conjunction with the State. Let the consumers, organised territorially, announce their needs; let the producers, organised industrially, be responsible for the satisfaction of those needs. But responsibility involves rights, and the right of the producer must be the right to govern his own processes and methods of work. Foremen and managers must no longer be imposed from above and from without, but chosen from within the Guild by the workers themselves. If the question of payment and of prices was left to be settled by the State and the Guilds in joint committee, and if the State was sufficiently powerful to see that its needs were supplied, then the method and process of satisfying those needs might be fairly and fruitfully left to the organised producers.\*

Thus, and thus alone, can true democracy be realised. It is not often remembered that the largest part of a man's life is

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\* For a more definite exposition of this in practice the reader may consult the first pamphlet of the National Guilds League, entitled “National Guilds: An appeal to Trade Unionists.”



devoted to his work, and consequently a system of democracy which left a man's working hours bureaucratically controlled from without would give him but a partial and inadequate freedom. Indeed, external collective control might go far to stereotype production and to bind the worker in shackles of wrought iron. We have endeavoured to point out the lamentable and indisputable collapse of capitalist production as a national servant; but Collectivism has only too often strangled the rising hope of efficiency in bands of red tape. Whither, then, are we to turn for escape? Whither, save to the workers themselves? Freed at once from the infinite degradation of wage-slavery and from the petty but none the less exasperating tyranny of the State bureaucrat and the superior person, appealed to as responsible members of the community, and no longer as drudges and hirelings, vested with rights and duties and a full citizenship in labour and in leisure, what may they not perform for humanity when treated as human beings? A gamble, it may be urged, a reckless gamble on the virtues of mankind. The stake is the consumer's welfare, the prize a complete and genuine democracy. Yes, a gamble indeed. But is not the risk a fair one?

### **The Guild Idea.**

The Guild idea is confidence, as the Collectivist idea is suspicion. The Collectivist is always afraid—afraid of trusting the producer, afraid of the Trade Union. It is not strange, for Collectivism works with the grain of capitalist society, and naturally the monopolists of wealth, able and accustomed to play with the politicians, are afraid of the monopoly of labour. But National Guilds must emerge from Industrial Unions and National Guildsmen are not afraid of the Trade Unionist. Rather do they see in Trade Union ideals a hope for the future and a promise of stronger, finer work.

Trade Unionism has a far longer and a far more successful tradition in Great Britain than State Socialism. It has been in turn revolutionary and reformist. Under Robert Owen it aimed at the reconstitution of society; under the Junta, which dominated Trade Unionism in the seventies, it aimed at modifying the abuses of capitalism. As a revolutionary force it has hitherto failed; but it has the revolutionary tradition. As a reformist force it has frequently succeeded in raising the price of labour and bettering the conditions of employment. And despite the Munitions Act of 1915, imposed upon the workers under exceptional conditions, it is true that Trade Unionism, especially in the skilled industries, has been at least partly successful as a means of defence against capitalist aggression and for that reason, if for no other, has come to stay.

The economic basis of our society is struggle, the struggle to buy labour cheap and to sell it dear. In such a warfare the most powerful weapon is monopoly. The capitalists are dominant in proportion to their monopoly of the means of production; the workers in the same way can exercise power just in so far as labour is scarce or organised. To better the conditions of work and to raise the price of labour Trade Unionism has toiled at the organisation of the labour supply so that by a complete or semi-complete withdrawal of labour (or strike) a blow may be delivered against the hostile monopoly. Naturally this organisation has been easier in the skilled occupations, where the skill itself creates scarcity, and the unskilled workers are still for the most part standing alone and unregimented in their hopeless battle with capitalism. But wherever Trade Unionism has succeeded in establishing anything like an organised labour monopoly in a given industry, there it has undoubtedly been able to raise the workers' standard of living above the mere subsistence level to which capitalism tends to reduce it. It has been able, moreover, to impose rules and regulations which the Press-fed public particularly distrust. These rules aim frequently at the maintenance of the labour monopoly by refusing to allow a craft or grade to be overstocked with labour. Or else they may "limit output," not in order to defraud the consumer, but to prevent undue speeding up by remorseless employers. These rules are absolutely essential to any scheme of Trade Union defence, and they are paralleled by the agreement of the employers' "conferences," pools, and rings. Both parties are driven by the economic struggle to obtain a complete monopoly, and this can only be done by careful regulation both of labour and of capital. The extent to which Labour has held its own is the extent to which it has been organised.

### **Beyond Trade Unionism.**

But if Trade Unionism has been able in some cases to make a successful defence against capitalist exploitation, why should it not be able, by far-reaching organisation, to attack the hostile position and break down once and for all this clumsy structure of industrialism which no individual wanted and no individual can destroy? This mushroom growth can have little attraction for the public, ground miserably between the two conflicting monopolies. Why, then, should the public be afraid of a revolutionary Trade Unionism, provided that Trade Unionism aims at becoming a responsible national partner and not a mere sectional tyrant, as illimitably selfish as it may be illimitably powerful?

To Revolutionary Trade Unionism the Guild idea looks. It urges a Trade Union policy, which will begin with a tremendous organising campaign to stiffen and complete the Labour



monopoly, and will pass to a demand for the control and management of industry in partnership with the State. Nationalisation it will demand to abolish the capitalists, but with nationalisation it will demand Trade Union control to ensure industrial democracy. The struggling, reformist Trade Union must pass into the controlling, responsible Guild.

We have seen that, in the face of economic monopoly, Labour's political activities are dominated, despite a wide franchise, by the power of the plutocrat. And because of this we saw reason to fear that, if Collectivism was introduced piecemeal while the plutocracy still controlled the national legislature and executive, the nation would not break the bonds of its servitude. But if Labour itself wields the weapon of monopoly, we have some guarantee that the wage system will be definitely destroyed and the yoke of plutocracy definitely abolished.

The objection will at once be raised that by substituting organised Labour for organised capital we are merely substituting one tyrant for another, and that the whips of Industrialism may yield to the scorpions of Syndicalism. Parallels will be cited from the narrow conservatism of the Mediæval Craft Guilds, and all the prejudices of the consumer will be aroused against the greed, the laziness, and the unparalleled effrontery of the organised producer. But these criticisms, when the mere abusive anger of the Socialist accused of being pig-headed has been cleared away, all centre round two points. The first is confidence in man and the second is confidence in organisation.

The Collectivist insists that, if you liberate the producer, he will ruin you with his indolence and greed. The Collectivist motto is "I Suspect," and its crest "The Worker Couchant and the State Inspector Rampant." The vital and incontestable fact is his refusal to trust the worker. The underlying idea of National Guilds is trust. It welcomes the risk, and declares for self-government and responsibility in industry. It claims that the limitations of the modern wage-slave are not caused by the inherent vice of humanity but by the hateful grip of the wage system—and that it is the height of injustice to brand the worker eternally for any weakness that may appear in the world of to-day. While Labour is a commodity, bought and sold according to the higgling of the market, while the labourer is always regarded as a factor in production and never as a creative person with human rights and duties, bitter criticism of the working classes is thoughtless slander, and no indictment of humanity can possibly be valid! But break the wage system on the wheel of Trade Unionism, and break together with it the purely materialist outlook upon Labour, and then, and not till then, will it be time to say whether or not the producers are fit to govern the methods and process of production. In the meantime National Guildsmen stand for optimism, for faith in humanity. To prove them right or wrong is not in the power of logic. We can but see.



## The Method of the Guilds.

So much for the criticism of men. There remains the criticism of organisation. How, it is asked, is society to be saved from the oppression of its new master, the great Labour Monopoly? How could it deal with a selfish, a narrow, an unscrupulous Guild? Where shall a hook be found to draw out the New Leviathan? But these objections do not apply to National Guilds. For this system implies that the State owns the means of production and distribution, while the Guilds control them. National Guilds demand a national partnership, thus following not only expediency, but logic. Ultimate authority cannot be allowed to rest with either producers or consumers; it can only reside in the community as a whole, and can only be expressed through the action and interaction of the various functional bodies within the community—that is to say, in the economic sphere, of the State and the Guild. The State, by its charge on the Guild for the use of capital and stock—a charge to be re-assessed at frequent intervals—would assure the absorption of the economic surplus, not by any individual or Guild, but by the community as a whole. Each Guild, entrusted with the duty of running its own industry, would be internally self-governing, and would arrange for the distribution of its income among the members, conditions of labour, and the election of its own officers. If we grant that human nature, released from the bondage of wage-slavery, is capable of self-government, there is no reason whatever to suppose that the brain of man cannot devise machinery capable of holding together this partnership of State and Guilds. But partnership it must be, a partnership with mutual rights and duties. Otherwise is the national balance lost, and the scales sink either to a rigid bureaucracy or to the menace of anarchic sectionalism. Once it is realised that National Guildsmen aim at the only way of effective reconciliation between the competing claims of Collectivism and Syndicalism, Socialism will be less suspect to Trade Unionists and Trade Unionism less suspect to the public.

The Guild idea is as simple as it is revolutionary. Its appeal is not limited to remote concepts, or to an extravagant call to the abstract ideas that may rouse the Latin race but do not touch the British type of mind. It approaches the average man of this nation on his strongest side and it regards him, not only as an idealist, but as a worker. It suggests that the ugly system under which he lives prevents him from doing good work, even if he would; that his craftsmanship is never regarded as something personal and precious, but always as something to be sold at the best market price, and that, whether he is working for a private or a public master, it is better to be a responsible and self-governing person than a watched and ticketed unit under a bureaucratic dominion.



Men complain that politics have become clogged in their own machinery and assure us that without devolution and decentralisation democracy cannot live. And if that is true of politics, it is equally true of industry. Therefore the devotees of freedom in industry will see to it that National Guilds do not become over-centralised and perish of their own dead weight. Just as the State must cede industrial power to the Guilds, the various Guilds must cede freedom to their branches. While the Guild is the unit of marketing and of exchange, the workshop must, as far as possible, be the unit of production. Thus, and thus only, can a genuine democracy of work be maintained and the initiative of the individual and the group find expression and encouragement. Capitalism has made of work a purely commercial activity, a soulless and a joyless thing. But substitute the national service of the Guilds for the profiteering of the few; substitute responsible labour for a saleable commodity; substitute self-government and decentralisation for the bureaucracy and demoralising hugeness of the modern State and the modern joint stock company; and then it may be possible once more to speak of a "joy in labour," and once more to hope that men may be proud of quality and not of quantity in their work. There is a cant of the middle ages, and a cant of "joy in labour," but it were better, perhaps, to risk that cant than to reconcile ourselves for ever to the philosophy of Capitalism and of Collectivism, which declares that work is a necessary evil never to be made pleasant, and that the workers' only hope is a leisure which shall be longer, richer, and well adorned with municipal amenities.

### **What the Public Wants.**

The interests of maker and of user are so far from being really hostile that they would find in a sane society a complete reconciliation. Cheapness and quantity are the battle-cries of competitive capitalism, and therefore to-day we are eternally fobbed off with the worthless and the nasty. The merchant's sole business is to sell his wares, and by means of booming and blatant advertisements to foist upon the public his own particular commodity. A deluded people imagines that the merchants sell what the public wants. As a matter of fact the public wants what the merchants sell, for it is only necessary to announce on every hoarding and in every paper that you cannot do without such-and-such, and the public at once discovers that it needs it. In other words, it swallows with avidity what it is told to take in. And the present economic system, based upon the relentless hunt for profits, ensures that the public is swindled.

And yet the public, mocked, cheated, and robbed by the exploiters of modern commerce, is afraid of Trade Unions, afraid of the producing classes! At the present day every kind of

pressure is brought to bear even upon the honourable tradesman to drive him to dishonourable measures: the very essence of profiteering is deceit. But the victims of this gigantic fraud are taught to fear the workers, who, under the economy of National Guilds, would have no financial motive for exploitation. Rather the whole tenor of their existence, their new acquisition of status as responsible members of the community and no longer as hireling drudges of a private pilferer, and the general substitution of loyal service for shameless snatching would encourage them to work for themselves and for others in a newer and finer spirit. What benefits the maker will benefit the user; the worker, no longer driven to toil for another's gain, will do better work because of his freedom. The public, did it only know, has far more to fear from the shackling of industry than from its release; in the willing service of free men it will find perhaps a larger quantity of production, certainly a richer quality. The monuments of bygone epochs of our history remind us from time to time, as they stand forth amid the mean squalor of our commercial age, that there was once in this country a tradition of craftsmanship and a spirit of strong beauty. And this tradition and spirit need not be limited to the old industry of hands, but may reappear wherever the good work of free men is turned to the finer purposes of humanity. But the wage system, with its relentless struggle for profits, has inevitably crushed and beaten down the nobler instincts of the worker. Are we, then to accept in dull despair the bitter cry that craftsmanship is dead and that the old traditions have perished? Each must cast his eye upon the sordid immensity of industrialism around him and must make his own decision. But for those who believe that the spirit is not dead but sleeping there is but one way to arouse it. And that is the way of National Guilds,

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